Making the Global Studio sustainable: project update

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Projects funded last year under the themed headings of ‘transitions’, ‘community collaboration’ and ‘innovation’, are now at their midway stage, and what follows are interim reports from some of the project holders on the progress of the work-in-hand.

The projects are due to complete in Summer 2009 with associated reports and other deliverables available on our website. We look forward to disseminating outcomes, which we expect will provide valuable insights for staff throughout the art, design and media sector.

Making the Global Studio sustainable
University of Northumbria

Over the past three years the School of Design at Northumbria University has been experimenting with an innovative learning and teaching model named the Global Studio. The Global Studio is a teaching, learning and research initiative that links design students, academics and industry partners across the globe. For example, in one project last year staff and students from Northumbria University collaborated across distance with students from Hong-ik University in Korea and industry partners from Motorola based in London and Seoul. In another project, Northumbria students collaborated with students from Auburn University in the US and their industry partners, Great Southern Wood. This year Northumbria students are collaborating on design projects with students from Ohio State University in the US, RMIT in Australia, Hong-ik in Korea, Napier in Scotland and a multinational organisation from the Healthcare industry.

The aims of the Global Studio are linked with research undertaken on changes in the organisation of product development (Bohemia & Harman, 2008; Bruce & Cooper, 2000; Cooper, 1986). These changes highlight the importance of equipping design students with skills for working in globally networked organisations, particularly skills in intercultural communication and collaboration.

An important aspect of the Global Studio is the use of Web 2.0 technologies by students to communicate across participating institutions. Information exchange and communication is primarily undertaken via Wiki pages supplemented by other ICT technologies such as teleconferencing, video conferencing and email. The Wiki pages provide a common interface and space for staff, students and industry partners to collaborate on the design projects. The cross-institutional collaborations have enabled the intersection of various pedagogical approaches, as well as the intersection of both disciplinary and practice-based knowledges. This begins to draw attention to the importance of social and cultural context in the production of knowledge (Gherardi, 2006).

Furthermore, the incorporation of Web 2.0 technologies in the Global Studio has produced a number of unanticipated outcomes in relation to learning. For example, it has contributed to the development of student-authored content, thus enabling students to take an active role in their learning. The shared Wiki pages also provide students with an opportunity to learn from and with fellow students from their own and participating universities. A socio-cultural theorisation of learning, which draws attention to the ways students learn in and through practice, >>
Making the Creative Process Visible
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// The purpose of this project is to identify and devise more effective means of teaching the development of ideas in creative practice. If basic structures can be taught more directly, students can learn about the mechanisms of creativity itself, adapt them to their own practice, leading ultimately to more effective and focused artists.

The main outcome of the project is the production of a range of Mpeg case studies that demonstrate ways in which ideas are generated, recorded and extended at key stages in the development of a body of work. This obviously involves a close relationship with the selected students to identify often-subtle changes in ideas and document evidence in the form of drawing, photography, ceramics or footage of process.

Initially, a formal agreement was drawn up requesting full use of students’ work and working methods in the making of the films. Whilst not legally binding, this agreement provided an important teaching opportunity, leading to discussions about publication of the project. In this regard, the project offered a living example of professional practice to both the BA and MA ceramic courses, which could also become part of the guidance for delivery.

The recording of practice took place over the period February to October 2008, culminating in live interviews with students in their final exhibition space. Rather than documenting each sequential piece leading to this point, there had to be a broad formal denoting basic developmental stages and decisions made as to what demonstrated these most effectively. For the MA students, the compilation of data became a part of weekly tutorials using the notion of creative structures as the basis for discussing their work. Students were also invited to suggest their own methods.

Whist still imagery could be gradually compiled, documenting different processes proved more difficult as it was not always possible to be in the right place at the right time, particularly during times of high experimentation and in the event of ‘happy accidents’. There were also instances when time was spent recording actions that later proved inconsequential to the final work. It became clear that guidance for the delivery of the Mpeg case studies would need to incorporate weaknesses in students’ development as well as successes, whilst remaining aware of any ethical dilemma this presents.

A Powerpoint presentation has been made available to each student setting out their selected images in order of development, asking if there are any omissions or faults. The interview footage now needs to be edited and additional imagery added. This process will either affirm or reject developmental structures already identified and possibly add more. The important point to make clear is that such structures are already present in creative practice at various stages in its development, this project will simply identify them and make them visible so they can be openly employed by students enabling them greater focus and opportunity for ideas.

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References